



Tuesday Tools: Observation – Documenting Music and Creativity

Hello Rock and Roll community and welcome to another Tuesday Training tools as we discuss our focus for this month: observation. Last week, we discussed responding to musical observations – how can adults in the room best support a child as musical or otherwise creative work is happening? Today we'll discuss strategies for documenting creative expression to give yourself a wider perspective on a child's artistic development and what to do when you see those magical creative things happen in your classroom.

Music Disappears

When a child paints a painting, sculpts clay, or strings beads on a thread, you're automatically left with a physical record of their creative work. Often, we're left with so many pieces of artwork we don't know what to do with them all! But with careful selection and organization, pieces of visual artwork leave a trail of breadcrumbs that tells the story of a child's development and growth. You can see how a child has changed over time by comparing a sketch from September to one they made in June.

Music, on the other hand, is ephemeral: once you sing or play a song, it disappears. To track a child's musical and creative growth and development, we must be able to observe and document it the way we'd document any other activity in the classroom.

Digital Recording

The most straightforward way to document creative work is to use technology to record video of the child. This way, you get a full sense of the child's experience in your room. Be sure to organize your recordings by date, student, and if possible, subject so you know what you're looking at later and can be aware if you need to focus on students whose work you may have missed.

Observer Effect

In science, the observer effect means that by observing something we interact with something, and that by interacting with it, we inevitably change it. Students may be used to being recorded with an iPad, but it may still make them feel self-aware and take them out of their flow. You might consider audio recording as a discrete way to record sound without sticking a device in a child's face.

Taking Notes

Of course, you can always observe the old-fashioned way and just take notes in your journal, notebook, or wherever you're keeping your written observations of children. When writing, describe not just what instrument the child is playing, but how they're playing it. Is the music random or repetitive? Gentle or loud? By themselves or with a classmate? Is the child using words or stories? Are they fixated on a song we sang in class? Do they repeat songs over and over? How long does the fixation last before they move on to new material?

This information can be invaluable as an educator – you may notice patterns or trends that help you plan your classroom design, or which materials you put out on shelves. You may even notice social-emotional clues that can help you understand classroom behaviors more deeply. But you can't track those patterns if you don't have a record of them. This week, try to document the creative behaviors in your classes as part of your observation work and see what even a few days of observation and documentation can yield.

Have a great week everyone! There won't be Tuesday Tools next week since we'll be training together in person. Chen and I have some exciting things planned for you, so please come with a can-do attitude and ready to move and play. See you then!